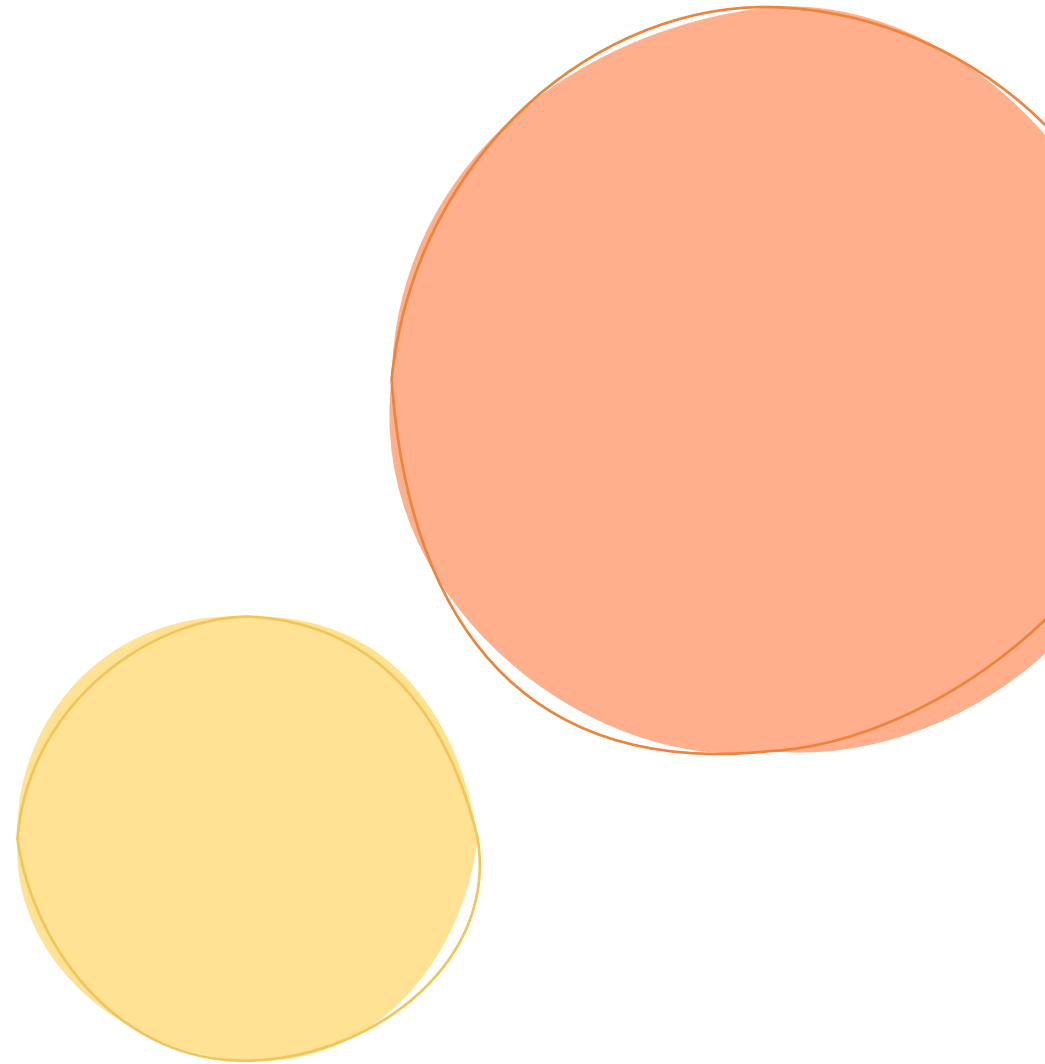


**Archived:** Exploring the relationship between home  
and self through collecting



This exegesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Design degree.

School of Art & Design, 2024

Ashlyn Koh

## Abstract

*Archived: Exploring the relationship between home and self through collecting* is a practice-based research that explores the concept of collecting and making-home through a series of practices.

*Archived* expands the spatial concept of home through emotional ties, utilising nostalgia, from the perspective of an immigrant with multiple homes in mind. Collecting is offered as a potential method of making-home practice through its ability to grasp moments of the mundane, providing personal narratives in the form of identity and memory.

My practical project, *Museum of Memory*, roots from the learning of two other prior practices *MERRY* and *I was born a fish with legs*. Through *MERRY*, creation of a collectible, I attempted to evoke the joy of collecting through nostalgic recollection of home and the holiday season. The autobiographic picture storybook *I was born a fish with legs* then explores the subjective reasoning behind collecting and the healing potential through making-home. Lastly, *Museum of Memory*, an AR interactive picture book, merges both practices together to make collecting a universal experience.

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

05/07/2024

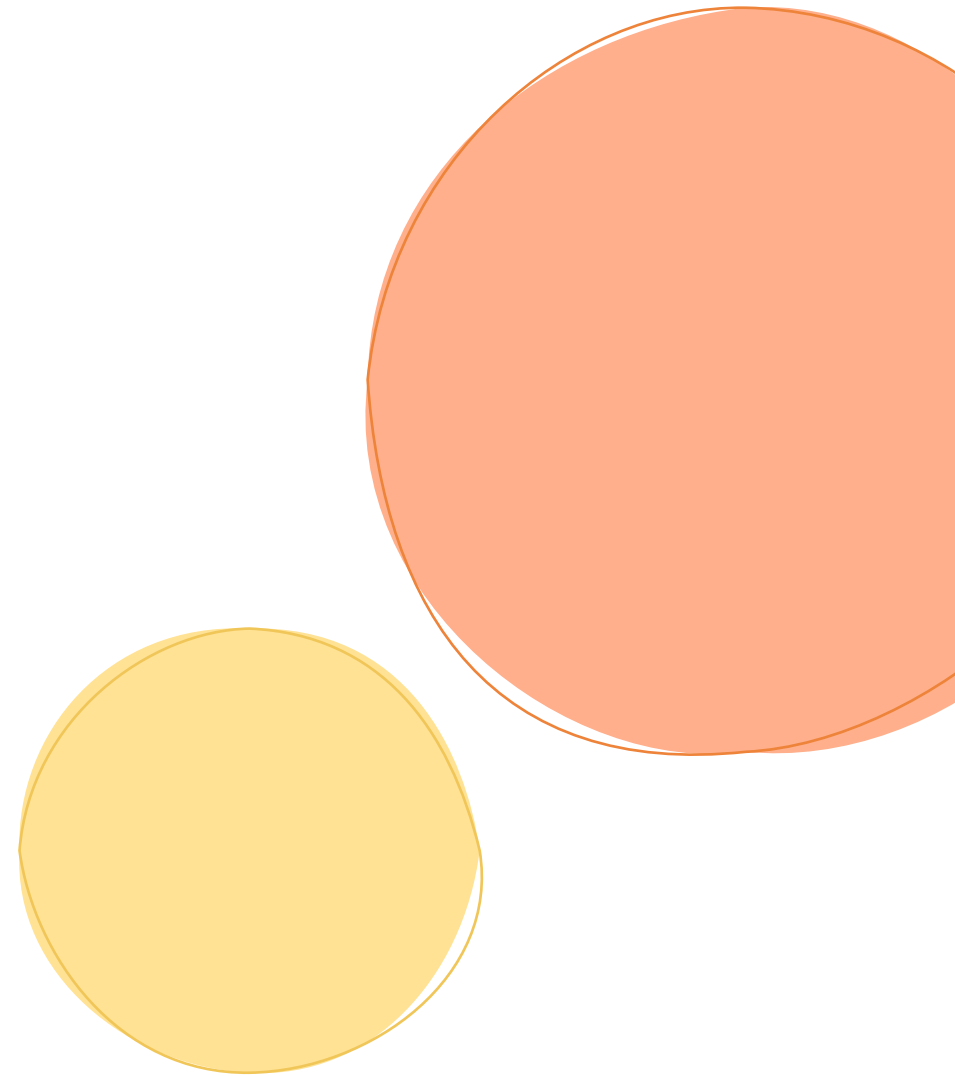
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Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to my family and friends for their constant support leading to the conclusion of this research. Our memories have inspired me to take on this research, as an acknowledgement of the cherished past.

## Positioning the Researcher



## Search of Home

As far as memory takes me, reminiscences of home were always antithetical; or rather, the recollection of memories claimed that I lived in a *house* for majority of my childhood, void of the feeling of *home*. It was probably the experience of loss I experienced at six, or it could have been the blinking Russian doll<sup>1</sup> that used to sit on the top of my shelf. I often dream of the houses I lived, in South Korea, but they usually appear empty, as I am chased by imaginary figures of the night. These homes do not offer any hospitality, but I cannot call these dreams a nightmare, as it is still a nostalgic recalling.

I moved to New Zealand with my family in 2010 from Korea. We briefly settled in Karaka<sup>2</sup>, where our relatives were. We were physically isolated from the rest of the community but ironically the feeling of home only grew slightly as I got to spend more time with my family. Yet, I was in a constant turmoil of identifying oneself culturally as I tried to settle in a new country.

In less than a year of immigrating to New Zealand, my family moved closer to central Auckland in a unit where we lived for six years. I still often think

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<sup>1</sup> It was gifted to me after my grandmother's trip to Russia, hence I could not put it away. As a child, I remember being absolutely terrified by it every night but told no one in the family about it.

of this place – a frequent nostalgic recollection. Memories of this house are remembered mainly as scent, which I wrote about in 2021, titled Lavender.

*“Before we moved here, the home we lived in used to get filled with the scent of lavender every summer night as we left the terrace door wide open. A stray ginger used to visit from time to time, enjoying the sun on the corner of the deck (Figure 1.). The unit had less rooms compared to the house we are living in now, but we were a bigger family. A bed took the place of a couch in the living room, which we did not mind at all. Our unit was secluded from the main road which gave us the privacy to leave the terrace door opened during the day. A little mandarin tree grew under the shade of overhanging trees from the neighbours. It bore a single fruit which hung all year long.”*

- Excerpt from *Lavender*, originally written in Korean by me.

<sup>2</sup> Small rural area in the south of Auckland. The bus ride to my intermediate school used to be more than an hour long.

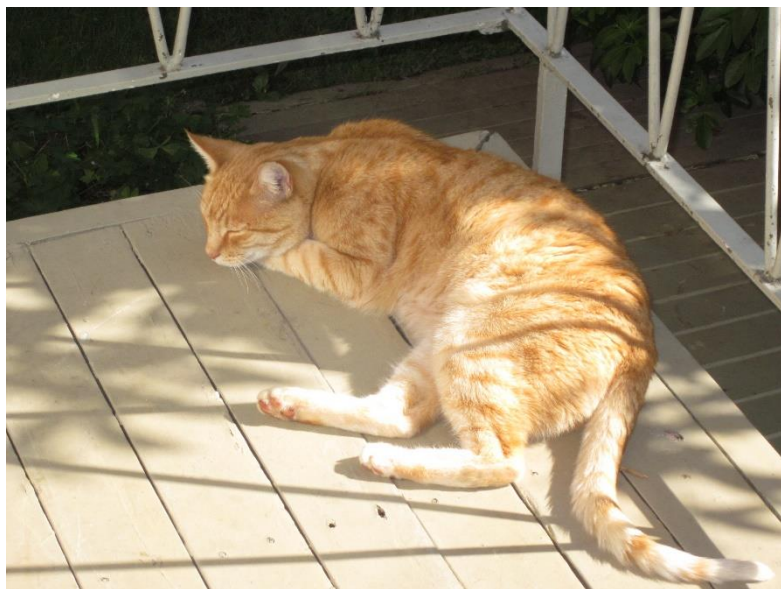


Figure 1. Ashlyn Koh, ginger stray that used to visit our house, 2011. Despite the love for animals, I did not grow up in a household with pets. My family used to prepare food and treats for this stray that visited us day and night, which remains everyone's key memory of the old unit we lived in.

While most memories of the house remain nostalgic and sentimental, I am yet to overcome certain experiences of the past. Nearing the end of my studies in college, I was diagnosed with a rare eye condition<sup>3</sup>, which resulted in partial vision loss. Lavender scented nights were often filled with negativity as I would describe those days as being completely submerged underwater. At one point of the treatment, a blanket was hung over the

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<sup>3</sup> Which was later diagnosed as a mix of MEWDS (Multiple Evanescent White Dot Syndrome) and PIC (Punctate Inner Choroidopathy), and resulted in two complications during the two years of treatment.

blinds of the window to stop the sunlight from burning my chemical-treated skin. I lived in darkness the next few days.

Among the days of suffering there was a continuous search of home. Perhaps in need of reassurance that I am going to be fine, because that is the feeling of being at home: a safe, secure place, extending behind its meaning of a physical dwelling. As a second-generation immigrant, physical space often seemed volatile. I would call New Zealand home, but I was often alienated by fragmented memories of motherland. According to Shelley Mallett, it is a confused search – a sentimental and nostalgic journey for a lost time and space (2004).

## Collecting

Growing up, I was not a child who would normally ask for toys. I was a very active child who spent most of her time outdoors when she could. Just before our family moved out to New Zealand, I remember once being ambitious about a miniature food collection that was released by Megahouse and Re-Ment<sup>4</sup> at the time.

<sup>4</sup> Megahouse and Re-Ment are both Japanese toy manufacturers. While they are still both in business, Megahouse has discontinued their miniature food collection

Looking back, collecting has always been part of me. After we settled in New Zealand, I was gifted a few gift boxes by my mom to organize my precious belongings. I remember calling them my treasure boxes, and gathered everything that was worthy of keeping. When I moved to my most recent place, I went through these so-called treasure boxes – only to unravel a pile of, what I called back then, trash. The collection included parts of packaging or unusable items such as cords or little pieces of packaging plastic, which the younger me saw as lanterns or flower beds.



Figure 2. Ashlyn Koh, Example of my collection - shells I used to collect as part of family visits to the beach. 2024

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and now focuses on producing figurines. Re-Ment mainly produces collections of miniature objects and diorama.

<sup>5</sup> Term that combines Kid and Adult. While it is defined by an adult who enjoys doing things that are intended for children, this seems to be an understatement. Kidult

As I grew older, I became a collector of many different things, including picture books, art toys and miniatures to list a few (Figure 2.). Why collect? Why figurines and toys? There must be other productive and valuable things out there. I often get asked, as toys or kidult<sup>5</sup> hobbies are frequently portrayed as immature. Although if productivity was my main concern, I probably would not be collecting. I consider collecting as a way of embracing the things that I like. By surrounding myself with objects that I find comforting, often those in relation to nostalgia and the inner child, I was able to get through challenging times. While I was getting treated for my eye condition, the fear of blindness was always present. After every appointment that took place weekly or fortnightly, I was instructed to visit the emergency room immediately if I were to wake up blind one morning. Unfortunately, I could not turn to my family at the time to support me and felt like I was going through this difficult time by myself. Towards the end of the treatment, I was completely consumed by anxiety and depression. The obsession towards materialistic things might have been a form of escapism. However, as my collection grew, the more I got to appreciate the things around me and found a way out of a negative cycle. While healing is an

culture has been a marketing strategy as well, targeting those who intend to heal through memories of childhood and nostalgia.

ongoing process, I have been longing to research into the act of collecting and its influence on a wider scale.

## Art and Craft

While I was always drawn towards creative practices, I was only able to make the decision to study design after experiencing vision loss as I started questioning my path in Biomedical Science. While I was on a leave from studies, I spent most of my time outdoors engaged in street photography outside of work hours. I also picked up a hobby of building miniatures and dioramas (Figure 3.). Craft was not only a way of destressing and healing but also made me realise how passionate I am with spatial concepts. Thus, I transferred to first study Spatial Design at AUT.

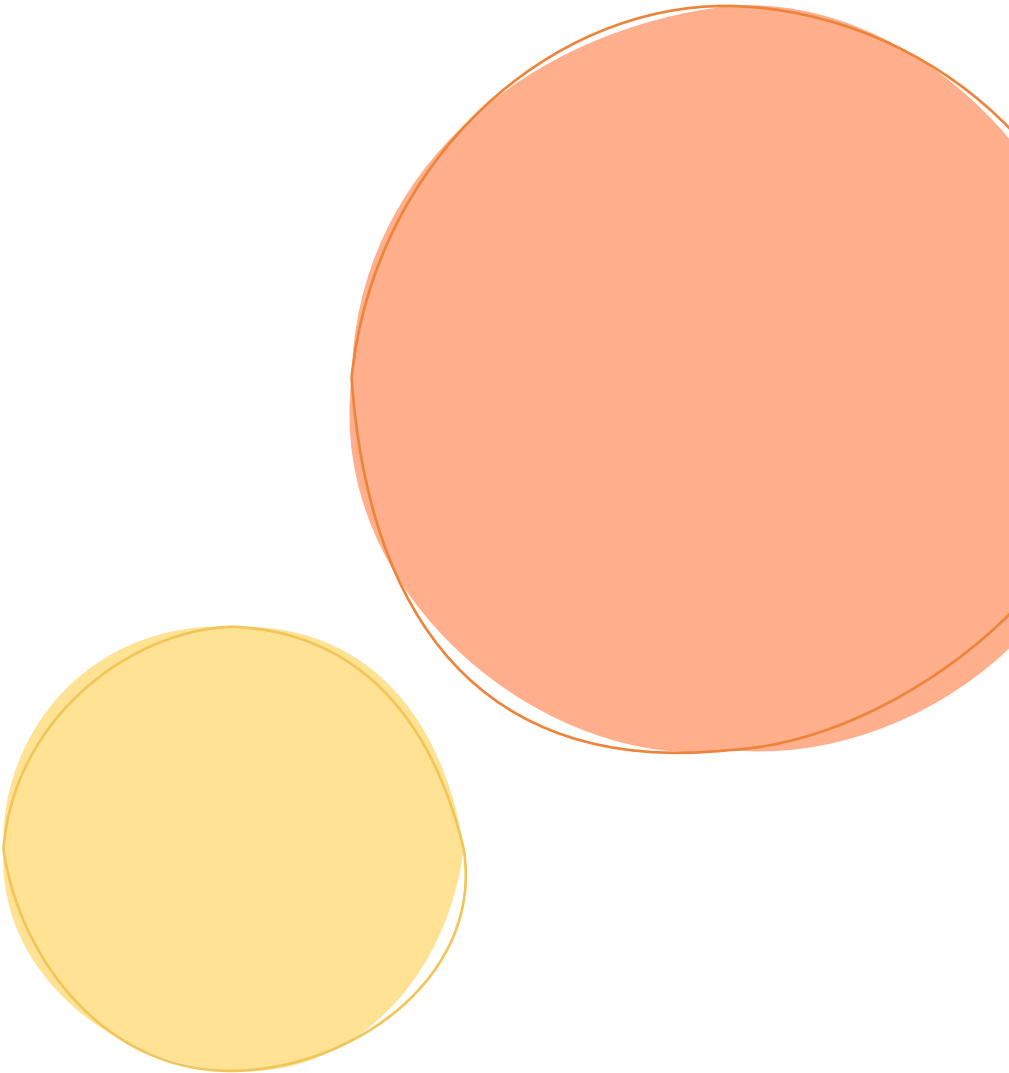
Studying in the design field was an eye-opening experience and I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of learning offered by Spatial Design. However, as the year proceeded, I felt confined by the realistic constraints of interactive spaces due to safety measures. Through my Motion Capture minor, I was able to communicate with Digital Design students to find out about the imaginative potential of Digital Design. I was drawn to the ability of generating creative spaces without physical limitations, and hence made the last transfer to study and graduate with an undergraduate diploma in

Digital Design. Through this project, I aim to merge analogue and digital practice to explore the spatial relationship between me and my collection.



Figure 3. Ashlyn Koh, Miniature bookshelf built as part of a Spatial Design project, 2019

# Contextual Review



## Introduction

This chapter is crucial for understanding how individuals and communities construct and experience home, particularly through the lenses of memory, identity, and emotional connection. By delving into historical definitions and contemporary perceptions of home, I aim to unravel how this concept has evolved over time, influenced by socio-economic changes and cultural shifts. Additionally, the chapter will explore remembered spaces, emphasizing how memories and nostalgic recollections shape our understanding and attachment to physical and emotional spaces. This includes personal narratives that highlight the dynamic and often fluid nature of home, reflecting the ongoing search for stability and belonging in a constantly changing world (Mallett, 2004). Furthermore, the practice of making-home will be examined through theoretical frameworks and practical examples, illustrating how individuals create and sustain a sense of home through everyday practices and material engagements. Artistic representation of home in media will also be analysed to provide insights into how productions provide a perspective on the spatial concept of home. Collecting, as a significant home-making practice, will be explored in depth to understand its symbolic and practical dimensions, revealing how material objects contribute to emotional well-being and identity formation (Stewart, 1993).

## Part 1.

“Every house ought to possess a ‘Museum,’ even if it is only one shelf in a small cupboard; here, carefully dated and named, should be placed the pretty shells you gather on the seashore, the old fossils you find in the rocks, the skeleton leaves you pick up from under the hedges, the strange orchids you find on the downs.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Tom Thumb Wedding*, p. 5. Excerpt retrieved from ON LONGING.

## Defining Home

The concept of home transcends the mere physical structure of a dwelling, embodying a complex interplay of psychological, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Historically, the term “home” originates from the Anglo-Saxon word “ham,” which referred to a village, estate, or town, signifying a communal and collective space (Douglas, 1991). Over time, socio-economic changes, particularly those associated with the rise of private homeownership in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, shifted the understanding of home towards a more individualized and privatized notion (Mallett, 2004). This transformation was influenced by real estate developments and marketing strategies that promoted the ideal of homeownership, leading to a decline in public housing and an increase in owner-occupied homes (Ronald, 2008). Consequently, the modern conception of home emphasizes privacy, intimacy, and personal space, reflecting broader cultural values of autonomy and individualism (Saunders, 1989). Home is thus not just a physical location, but a space imbued with meanings and emotions, where memories with loved ones are created and preserved. This is particularly evident in cross-cultural comparisons; for instance, in Korean, the closest term to home is “가족” (gajok), meaning family, highlighting the relational and emotional essence of home rather than its physicality. The dynamic nature of home, shaped by historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors, underscores its role as a fundamental

aspect of human experience, encompassing both a place of belonging and a state of being (Després, 1991).

Such a modern conception of home enables individuals to challenge and broaden their sense of feeling-at-home, as the meaning of home is not restricted to one’s physical space of living. I have previously written a personal essay about living with multiple homes in mind. Such homes can include places I have travelled which I feel deeply attached to, or could be places where I have grown up, like my hometown, or my current physical address. I often remember home from belongings, like the display cabinet my family had at home (Figure 4.) Being an immigrant also meant having another home I can return to, which holds a different sense of belonging to that of my home in New Zealand.



Figure 4. Ashlyn Koh, A display cabinet that I used to play with as a child. I was able to reunite with the same furniture at my relative's place in Germany, 2023

## Remembered Spaces

The notion of remembered spaces emphasizes that home is not just a physical entity but a construct that is continuously shaped by memories, experiences, and emotional ties. Shelley Mallett's work highlights the permeable and unstable boundaries of home, suggesting that our sense of place is deeply interwoven with personal and collective memories (Mallett, 2004). A space, when not occupied, is void of name or status. Empty space is vulnerable – as memories and experiences of former occupants are no longer valuable – thus can easily be altered by the new occupants. Figures 5 and 6 exemplify a place of memory. Although my grandma does not own the cottage anymore, the cottage remains a place of memory and nostalgia to our family. Regardless, our memory does not live within the cottage. While we continue to live with the memory of the cottage, the cottage as a space now holds a different meaning for those who currently occupy the cottage.

This fluidity of home is further explored by scholars such as Blunt and Dowling (2022), who argue that the concept of home is both materially and imaginatively constructed through everyday practices and narratives. Recent studies have expanded this understanding by examining the role of nostalgia in shaping our connection to past homes, suggesting that memories of home are often idealized and imbued with emotional

significance (Lewicka, 2011). Research by Easthope (2004) discusses how memories of home can be both comforting and unsettling, reflecting the complex and sometimes contradictory emotions associated with places of dwelling. This duality is evident in personal narratives where remembered spaces serve as anchors for identity and belonging, despite the physical changes or relocations that individuals might experience. For example, recent research by Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) examines how memories of home and place attachment are maintained across generations, emphasizing the role of storytelling and intergenerational communication



Figure 5. Ashlyn Koh, Grandma's cottage in Jeonju. 2018. My family used to make regular visits when we were in Korea. The cottage was built by my grandma but she no longer lives here.

in preserving these connections. Similarly, Scannell and Gifford (2010) discuss how place attachment is not only a product of past experiences but also a dynamic process influenced by ongoing interactions with the environment and community.

Understanding home as a remembered space involves acknowledging the dynamic interplay between memory, identity, and place, highlighting how past experiences continually shape our present sense of home (Manzo, 2003). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of migration and displacement, where the reconstruction of home in a new environment often involves a negotiation between past memories and present realities (Boccagni, 2017).



Figure 6. Ashlyn Koh, Pond near grandma's cottage. 2018. The pond was filled with lilies in the summer.

## Making-Home Practices

Physically, a dwelling provides the basic structure within which daily life unfolds, yet it is the emotional attachment and personal meaning attributed to this space that truly transform it into a home. This duality is especially evident in the experiences of immigrants and displaced individuals who must navigate the process of creating a sense of home in a new environment. The dislocation and adaptation inherent in migration highlight how home transcends mere physicality, becoming a site of memory, identity, and emotional resonance. Scholars such as Shelley Mallett (2004) emphasize that making-home is not merely about inhabiting a space but involves continuous practices that embed personal and cultural meanings into that space. For example, the incorporation of familiar objects and the recreation of habitual routines play pivotal roles in establishing continuity and a sense of normalcy in new surroundings (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). As Ralph and Staeheli say: "home is understood as a dynamic process of localising particular sets of relationships that do not necessarily depend on the essential qualities of a place. Home, in other words, is a process, an achievement involving both the people we share home with but also the material objects therein." (2011, p. 4) Practical examples, such as the use of personal narratives and case studies of immigrant experiences, reveal how individuals negotiate and redefine their sense of home amidst changing environments.

The significance of display spaces in the context of making-home practice cannot be overlooked. Objects, depending on their nature and purpose, sit in different compartments of a home. It is often these groupings of objects that define the living space or characteristics of the space. Effective display techniques can elevate the personal and aesthetic value of a collection, transforming a physical space into a narrative canvas that tells the story of the collector's life and interests.

Korean Illustrator Mogo Shin explores imaginary display spaces with her drawings. Through blending architectural elements and surrealism, Shin's work suggests that collections transcend mere physical objects, becoming vessels of narrative and identity. The immersive environments not only highlight the relationship between the collection and the collector, but also intrigues the viewers to delve deeper into her fictional world. Despite the elements of surrealism, the arrangement of familiar domestic objects adds an element of warmth, creating an environment that feels both strange and intimately known.

## Media Representation: *The House* (2022)

*The House* (2022) is a stop-motion animation film produced by Nexus Studios and released on Netflix. The film presents a unique anthology that explores the concept of home through three distinct stories set in different time periods. Each segment delves into the psychological and emotional dimensions of home, portraying it as a site of aspiration, struggle, and transformation.

The first chapter of the film features a poor family from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The family is invited to live in an extravagant mansion designed by a mysterious architect. While the parents are deluded by the luxury lifestyle, their daughter Mabel uncovers the true quality of the house. Uncanniness is prevalent throughout the chapter as Mabel encounters hidden workers of the house, almost zombified. Soon her parents are completely consumed by ambition, seeded by the architect, and are transformed into furnishings. As the house burns, Mabel and her sister Isobel escapes through the sacrifice of their mother who has turned into a curtain.

The second chapter, situated in a more contemporary setting, features a rat developer's futile attempts to renovate and sell the house that is infested by fur beetles and larvae. In a desperate attempt to repay the bank, the rat allows a couple to stay the night after a property viewing. It is later revealed that these guests are what the rat has been desperately trying to get rid of:

bugs. Discouraged from reality, the rat turns back to its primitive state and its former anthropomorphic properties are nowhere to be found.

The final chapter depicts a cat landlord Rosa's obsessive effort to restore the house amidst rising floodwater in an apocalyptic background. While others have left the building to find refuge, Rosa is persistent on restoring her property. Eventually, the remaining residents of the building are forced to leave the house due to continuous rising of the water levels. Rosa, who was pessimistic about her the friends' departure, eventually finds the courage to leave. As she makes the decision to do so, Rosa discovers that Cosmos, a craftsman, has been renovating the house to transform it into a ship. The film concludes with all four cats setting sail into the ocean.

Much like that of Wes Anderson's film, narratives of *The House* are structured into three individual chapters, intertwined by the spatial setting of the stories. The stories of ambition, tension between aspiration and reality, and transition from obsession to liberation all take place in the same house.

As viewers navigating the story, it is easy to blame the house for being cursed or bringing misfortune to those who reside in the house. However, to the occupants, the house is void of its past and is only used to project their unique desire. Through shifting narratives over time, the house represents varying identities and meanings depending on the occupants'

view of an “ideal home” (Mallett 2004, p. 70). This links back to the concept of *Remembered Spaces* I explored earlier in this contextual review and overall encapsulates the transient and fragile nature of home.

Such an idea is further highlighted by the decision of Rosa, who decides to abandon the house to follow her friends out into the ocean. Prior to finding out the changes Cosmos has made – so that Rosa could sail out in her home – Rosa realises that the meaning of home resides within memory and experience. With the absence of such properties, the house is no longer a home, but merely a building.

## Part 2.

“Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience.”

- Susan Stewart, 1993.

## History of Collection

Historically, collecting was often associated with the accumulation of rare and valuable objects by the wealthy, serving as a means of displaying power and prestige. Collections in ancient Rome, for example, included artifacts from conquered territories, symbolizing both the reach of the empire and the sophistication of its elite (Pearce, 1998). During the Renaissance, the practice of collecting became more systematic and scholarly, with the establishment of cabinets of curiosities. These collections were not only displays of wealth but also expressions of the owner's intellectual curiosity and desire to understand the natural world.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the industrial revolution and the rise of the middle class democratized collecting further. This period saw the emergence of collectors from diverse social backgrounds, driven by a range of motivations from nostalgia and personal interest to investment and social status. The modern era has seen a proliferation of specialized collecting communities and the advent of digital collecting, reflecting contemporary values and technological advancements (Stewart, 1993).

Today, collecting is seen as a way to engage with and make sense of the world, bridging the past and present through the preservation and interpretation of material culture (Pearce, 1998). In her book *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (1998), Susan M. Pearce challenges the reader by

further expanding on the idea of a collector and a collection, thus emphasizing that anyone, and anything can qualify as a collector and a collection, respectively.

While only a few identify themselves as collectors, collection may simply arise from the belief of its owner. For instance, it could be a series of stickers that cover the front of someone's laptop. It could be an accumulation of charms that dangle from a car key. An intriguing perspective about a collection is that a collection does not always have to belong in an interior space. A collection includes those that can be carried outside like clothing, or even those that permanently reside with the owner such as tattoos.

## Collecting viewed through *ON LONGING*

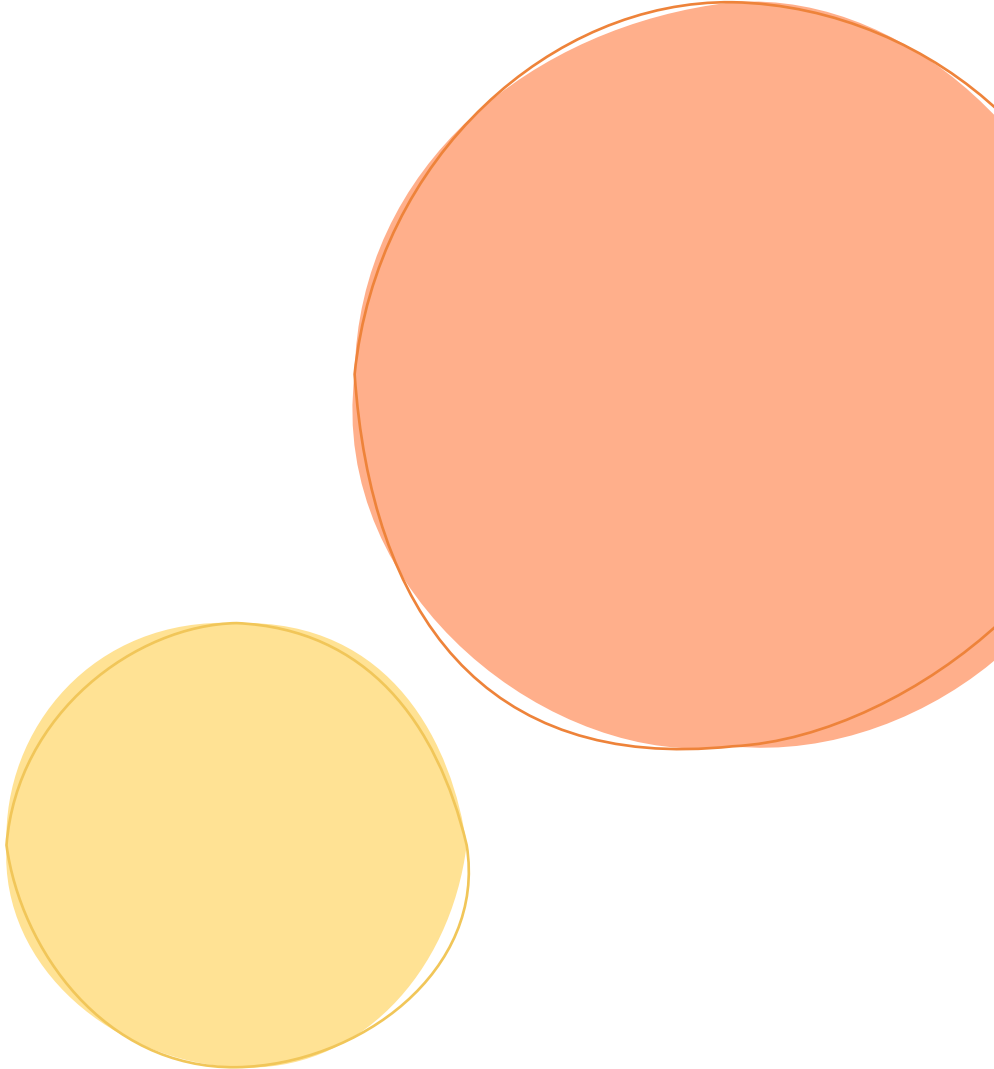
The art of collecting often encompasses more than just the accumulation of items; it is deeply intertwined with personal memory, identity, and emotional well-being. Susan Stewart's book, *ON LONGING: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* explores ways in which everyday objects and experiences are imbued with meaning, through metaphorical symbolism. Stewart delves into the ways that objects like miniatures, souvenirs, and collections serve as vessels of personal and cultural narratives, reflecting deeper human desires and societal constructs. Through her examination of the miniature, Stewart argues that these small-

scale objects create an intimate, enclosed world, contrasting sharply with the overwhelming vastness of the gigantic, which she discusses as representations of grandeur and the sublime in human experience.

Stewart's analysis is not merely about the physical attributes of these objects but also their symbolic roles in shaping identity and memory. For example, souvenirs are seen as tangible links to specific moments and places, encapsulating personal histories and emotions in a form that can be revisited and cherished due to the "temporality of everyday life" (1993, p. 14). This function of souvenirs aligns with her broader exploration of memory and nostalgia, suggesting that these objects serve as anchors in the fluid and often fragmented experience of modern life. The act of collecting, as Stewart describes, transforms mundane objects into significant parts of a personal narrative, creating a sense of order and continuity amidst the chaos of everyday existence (1993).

Moreover, Stewart's work intersects with broader cultural and philosophical discussions about the nature of representation and the human tendency to seek meaning in objects. By examining how objects like miniatures and souvenirs function in our lives, Stewart sheds light on the intricate relationship between material culture and the self, such as the thirst for an "authentic experience," (1993, p. 133) revealing the profound ways in which we use objects to navigate and make sense of our world.

# Methodological Framework



## Introduction

This project takes the form of a practice-based research, where research progresses through creative practice rather than solely relying on reading. According to Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, “practice-based research characterises the way in which practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work” (2009, p. 2). Methodology refers to a categorisation of a specific procedure or technique used as part of practice-based research. I mainly utilised autobiography and autoethnography as my methodology. Through autobiography, I was able to reflect on my experience of vision loss and how the practice of collecting was significant as part of healing. I then extend this experience through autoethnography to communicate the potential of collecting and home-making to personal well-being in relation to nostalgia.

The creative methods, referring to the specific procedure and techniques used, I have used includes digital fabrication, illustrated literature, and illustration with the addition of AR. The exploration of these methods provided a structural framework that guided me in my creative process as well as offering constant evaluation and critical feedback of my work in relation to the aim of the research.

## Autobiography and Autoethnography

Autobiography and autoethnography are two distinct methodologies. Autobiography is the narrative account of an individual's life story, focusing on personal experiences, memories, and reflections (S. Smith & Watson, 2010). It is a self-referential and introspective method where the writer aims to convey their personal journey, often highlighting significant events and their impact on the author's life.

By definition, refers to “an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyses or interprets the lived experience of the author” (Poulos, 2021, p. 4). Autoethnography merges autobiography with ethnography, thereby not only telling the personal story but also critically analysing and interpreting these experiences to offer insights into cultural practices and social phenomena. It utilizes the researcher’s own experiences as a primary source of data, enabling the researcher to draw on their personal experience as part of academic research and understanding.

“Unlike traditional research methods that aim for detached objectivity, autoethnography foregrounds the researcher’s subjectivity,” writes Tarisayi (2023). By applying a unique lens of perspective through lived experience, autoethnography captures human emotions and narratives that traditional research may overlook.

My research and practice utilise both autobiography and autoethnography to convey the potential of collecting. A picture storybook, *I was born a fish with legs*, is an autobiographical work that illustrates my personal struggles and mending through assistance of collecting as I come to appreciate my surroundings and find my subjective meaning of home. My final work, *Museum of Memories*, roots from the feeling of nostalgia, a communal feeling shared and understood by the wider community, to explore the act of collecting. This practice further develops into autoethnography as nostalgia poses a sense of “collective identity” (Panelas, 1982, p. 1425) through a generation who shares similar social and cultural backgrounds.

## Methods

As part of completing this project, I have used different mediums as part of creative practice, including both 3-dimensional and 2-dimensional work. While 3-dimensional work provides more interactivity between the work and I, the researcher, 2-dimensional work allowed me to delve into the emotional aspect of the research through the intimate activity of drawing. Overall, the depth of my research benefitted from prototyping multiple small projects.

My initial practice involved more three-dimensional work using digital fabrication, as I attempted to make a collectible of my own based on childhood memory. Questioning the personal importance and meaning of collection led to a more autobiographical work to explore my experience of vision loss and healing in the form of a picture book. Lastly, applying autoethnographic learning to create work that resonates with a larger audience through a picture book merged with AR.

## Journaling

Journaling offers therapeutic benefits and has capacity to enhance the depth and quality of qualitative research. James Pennebaker's extensive research highlights how writing about stressful or traumatic experiences

can significantly reduce stress and improve psychological well-being, as it aids in processing and understanding complex emotions (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). By providing a structured outlet for self-expression, journaling helps researchers capture the nuances of their cognitive and emotional responses, which can lead to more profound insights and a richer understanding of the research subject.

I have frequently retreated to journaling as part of my creative medium (Figure 7.). Through the compilation of notes from reading and cognitive flow, I was able to grasp the direction of my research through uncertainties. Moreover, as part of my autobiographical work, my habit of journaling has helped revisit experiences and emotions of the past. Experiences of the past tend to get diluted overtime. From experience, there is apparent duality posed by journaling. While analogue and digital journaling was a way of escapism and healing, revisiting records of the past was not an entirely comforting experience. Nonetheless, such uneasiness is a proof of evoking the past; to have it embedded in my practice.

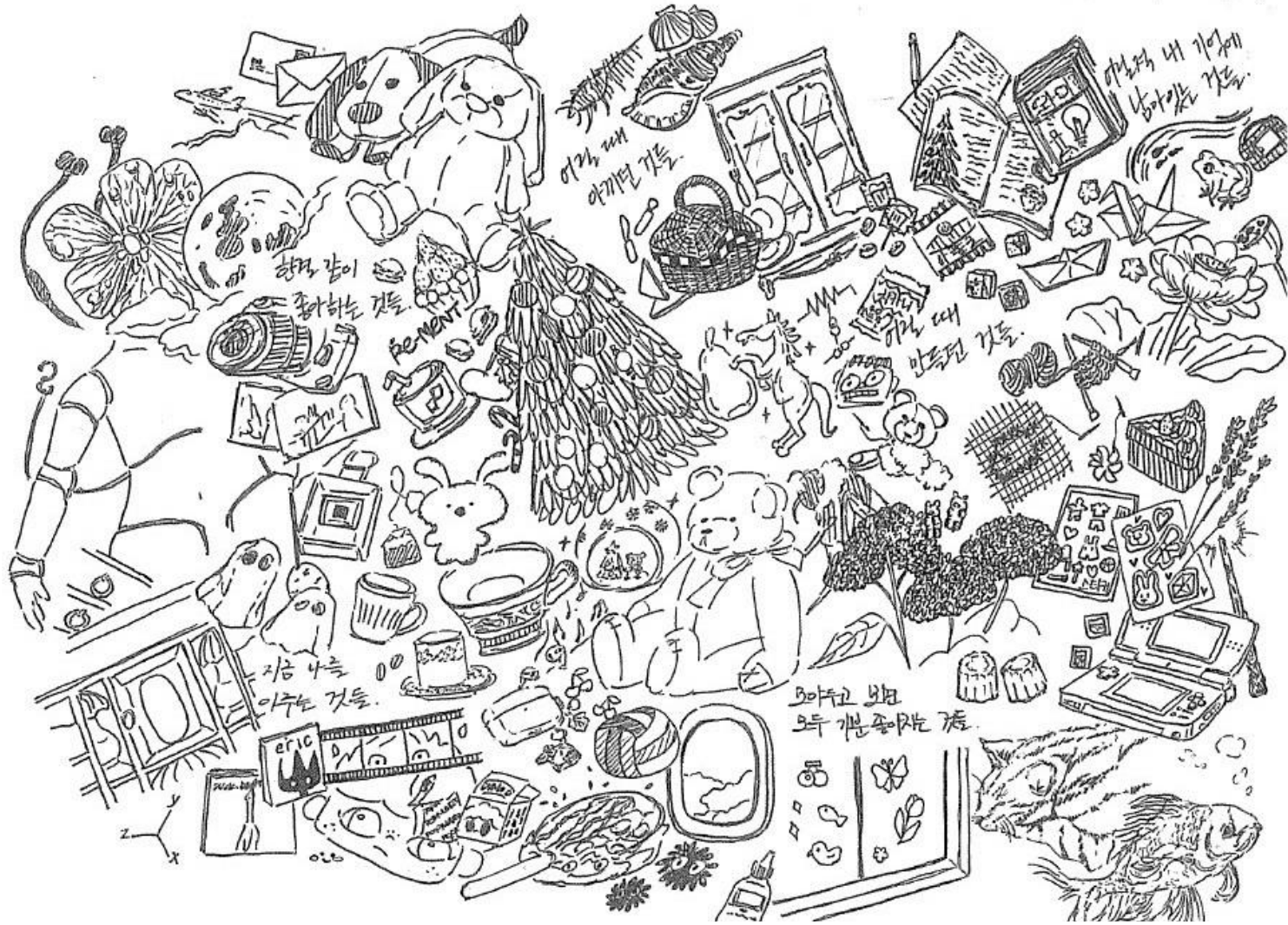


Figure 7. Ashlyn Koh, Map of everything that matters, 2024, scanned image

## Sketching

Sketching plays a role of conceptualization and development of ideas. It involves rapid generation of sketches to explore and visualize potential solutions and concepts, allowing researchers to externalize their thoughts and facilitate a deeper understanding of complex ideas. According to Lawson and Dorst (2013), sketching helps bridge the gap between abstract thinking and tangible outcomes, enabling designers to test and refine their ideas in a visual format. The iterative nature of sketching supports continuous improvement and innovation, as each sketch can lead to new insights and perspectives.

My ideation sketches ranged from rather rough sketches to more detailed sketches of ideas and concepts. The rough sketches allowed rapid ideation, facilitating quick exploration of multiple concepts without the constraints of precision or detail (Figure 8.).



Figure 8. Ashlyn Koh, Ideation Sketch, 2024, digital illustration

More refined sketches were made not only for ideation but also the communication of ideas (Figure 9.). Finalising of design required more attention to detail compared to the rough sketches that relied more on rapid cognitive flow. While these are not fully rendered drawings, the sketches serve as a means to communicate the ideation of the creator for further fabrication.

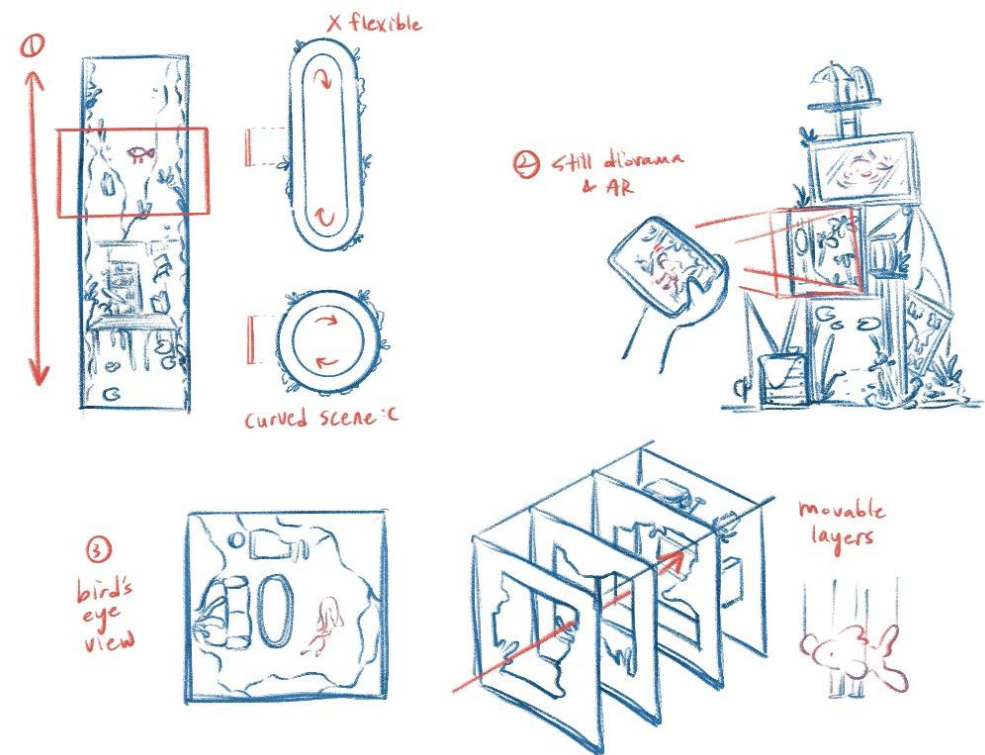


Figure 9. Ashlyn Koh, Fabrication Ideation, 2024, digital illustration

## Digital Fabrication

Digital Fabrication as a method involves using computer-controlled manufacturing processes to create physical objects from digital design, allowing practitioners to bridge between the physical realm and the digital realm. I have utilised digital fabrication with the minimal use of traditional sculpting to facilitate rapid prototyping (Figure 10.).

As a practitioner, I wanted to expand my technical knowledge beyond the ability to digitally simulate my vision. The initial motivation came from wanting to become familiar with the production process of collectable toys<sup>7</sup> as a collector. While utilising my tacit knowledge of CGI modelling, I was able to progress onward to post-production techniques, such as sanding, sculpting, moulding and casting, which will later be discussed in detail under the *Documentation of Practice*.

Through this rather intimate practice mixing the digital and the analogue, my aim was to create an “emotional connection” (Loveday, 2022, p. 348) between not only myself and my creation, but also from me to the viewer. In that the emotional quality of craft is communal, the creation becomes a

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<sup>7</sup> Often called art toys, these collectables were originally produced by independent artists but now are more often being produced and supplied by bigger companies.

vessel that holds meaning and purpose through the embodiment of the crafter’s experience and emotion.



Figure 10. Ashlyn Koh,  
*Tori*, 2023, CGI  
modelling in Nomad

While they are commonly made of PVC, there is no limitation to material use and could range from, and thus not be limited to, wood, resin and soft toys.

## Picture book

Before moving to New Zealand, I used to have a built-in bookshelf on one side of my wall filled with picture books. I often looked back to the books I treasured, that are no longer under my possession. It was natural that picture books gradually became part of my collection. Regardless of the language used, part of my travel routine is to visit a local bookstore to buy a picture book as a souvenir; a personal way of remembering my trips. The collection also involves familiar books of childhood, and new findings.

Denise I. Matulka classifies picture books into four categories: picture books, picture storybooks, illustrated books and informational picture books (2008).

- Picture Books: Illustrations on every page, with art almost dominating the text. The illustrations are pivotal to the story, with text playing an important but supporting role. Wordless picture books rely solely on illustrations and are designed to tell a story through a series of pictures carefully developed to carry the narrative (Matulka, 2008, p. 6).
- Picture Storybooks: The pictures complement the story, often mirroring the plot. The format reflects the meaning of the story; both the illustration and the text bear the burden of narration (Matulka, 2008, p. 7).

- Illustrated Books: Text takes centre stage, with pictures playing a supporting role. Illustrations are for the most part decoration. The text also tends not to be driven by the pictures (Matulka, 2008, p. 8).
- Informational Picture Books: Mostly used in an instructional capacity (Matulka, 2008, p. 9).

The use of picture books as a method harnesses the power of visual storytelling to enhance the reader's understanding and engagement, making complex ideas more accessible and relatable as exemplified in Figure 11.

I have referred to works of Shaun Tan for his ability to narrate stories with a mix of illustrations of the familiar and surreal, much like the work of Mogo Shin, as discussed in *Making-Home Practices*. The two works in particular that related to my research were *The Arrival* (2006), and *Eric* (2010).

*The Arrival* is a picture book that illustrates the story of a migrant, a father of a family, who relocates alone to an unknown country to work. The sense of alienation is expressed by his creation of surreal creatures and ingredients. As the man settles, he learns the story of other immigrants and slowly adjusts to the new environment through the help of those who have already settled. The idea of making-home is also prevalent in the book, as his empty room gradually gets filled up with his belongings and eventually,

the belongings of his family as he is reunited with his family in the land of the unknown.

*Eric*, a picture storybook, shares a similar background to that of *The Arrival*. However, instead of introducing a foreign environment, the story focuses on Eric, a creature who stays with a family, presumably in a house of a human, as a foreign exchange student. The feeling of alienation common to immigrants is represented through the appearance of Eric and how fascinated he is by everything he sees. The text implies that the family often had a difficult time understanding Eric and his behaviour. Following Eric's departure, the family finds a garden in the pantry, where he has been sleeping.

Through the collection of familiar flora of home, Eric was probably able to find comfort and gain the feeling of homeliness in a foreign land. Much like that of the room of the father in *The Arrival*, the gradual growth of the garden overtime would have contributed to Eric's temporal home-making practice. Furthermore, through his meaningful collection, Eric was able to emotionally evoke the family without the need for profound explanation or shared language.

Through *The Arrival* and *Eric*, Shaun Tan bridges cultural and linguistic gaps, making his work universal for those who share the experience of migration. To further aid this experience, Tan solely uses illustrations to convey the

story in the absence of text in *The Arrival*. This is achieved by the use of colours in *Eric*. While all other drawings are monotonous pencil drawings, the last illustration of *Eric* utilises vibrant colours to emphasize the distinctiveness of Eric and his experience.

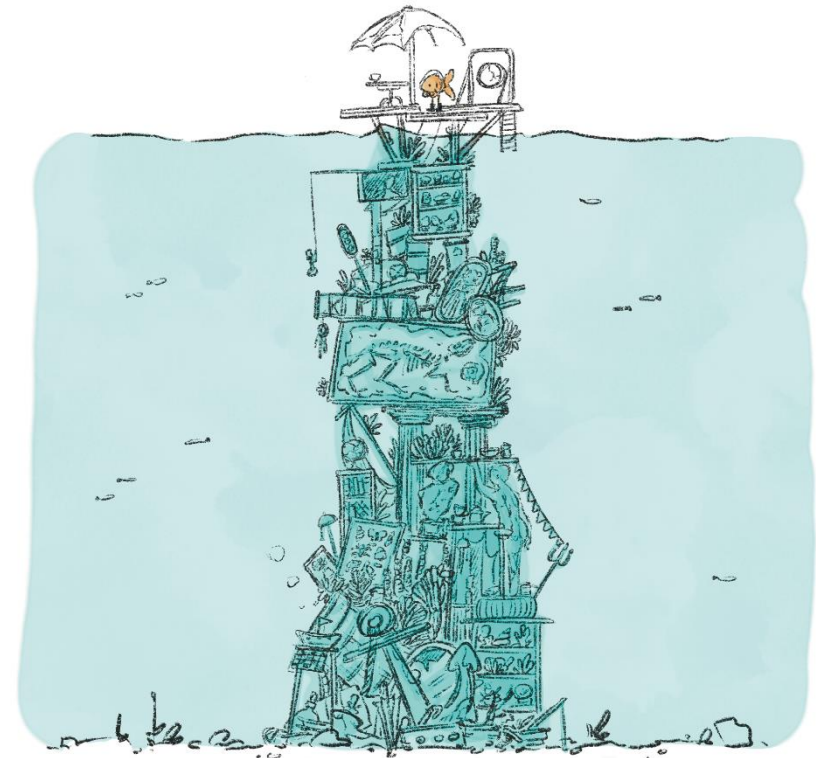


Figure 11. Ashlyn Koh, Concept art for *I was born a fish with legs*, 2024, digital illustration

## Illustrations and AR

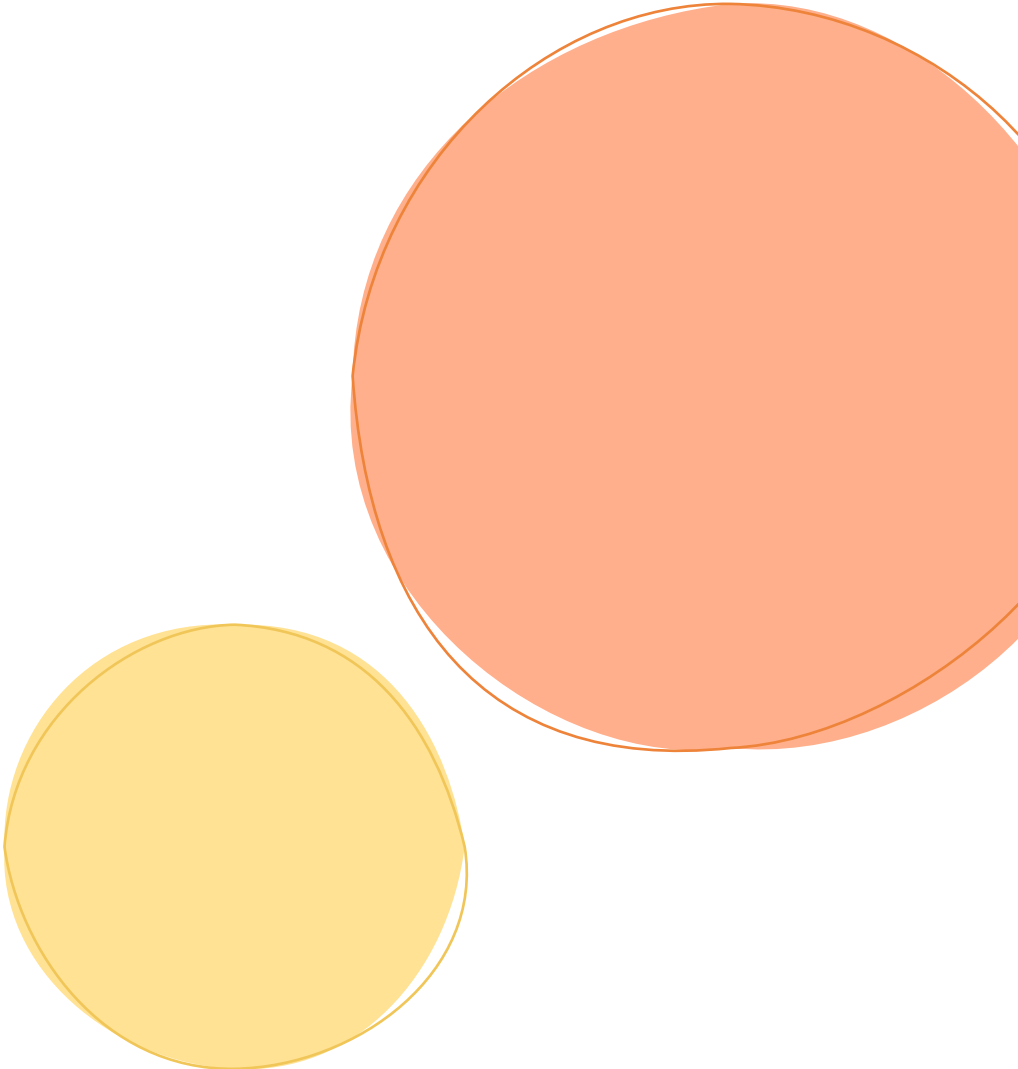
Augmented Reality (AR) integrates digital elements into the real world, allowing for a dynamic and engaging way to visualize and interact with presented data or creative work. While the definition of AR has been constantly evolving, it is suggested that “the notion of AR is not limited to any type of technology and could be reconsidered from a broad view nowadays” (Wu et al., 2013, p. 42). One of its more contemporary definitions includes: “a situation in which a real world context is dynamically overlaid with coherent location or context sensitive virtual information” (Klopfer and Squire, 2008, p. 205).

Work of Tatiana Tavares, *Saints of Paradox* (2019), utilises AR as part of digital narrative for her book. The AR narratives provide three different perspectives to a storybook that is physically presented. Through Tavares’ work, potential use of AR as a narrative medium is examined. Implementation of AR not only adds interactivity, but has the potential to manipulate the story and how the users perceive fictional narrative.

Merging AR with illustration enables artists to lend physical and digital mediums, pushing the boundaries of visual storytelling. This method allows for the creation of artworks that can change and respond to the viewer's actions, creating a personalized and engaging experience. With my research involving spatial concepts, AR enriches the viewer’s experience by allowing

immersive and interactive engagement with the virtual space. Use of multimedia also becomes available with the use of AR such as using 3D models or moving images as part of the AR experience, expanding narrative from two-dimensional space.

# Documentation of Practice



The documentation of practice records how creative practice contributes to the maturing of understanding on collecting and the concept of making-home.

## Making Collectibles: MERRY

The initial practice explores nostalgic memory of home in Korea through celebration of Christmas in the form of a collection. One Christmas, my dad brought a huge Christmas tree home. The tree was so big that it did not fit properly and ended up with its top being bent by the ceiling. Since it took so long for the family to decorate the tree, we did not dare take down the tree after Christmas. The tree stood in our living room all year round, surviving through the summer as well. Ever since we have moved to New Zealand, I have always wanted a tree nearing the Christmas season. It was not until in 2021 that I was finally able to get a small tree.

The tree was nothing like the one I had as a child. It was reasonably tall but narrow and barely filled the gap between the couch and the wall (Figure 13.). I wanted my little tree to



Figure 12. Ashlyn Koh, My tree in New Zealand before being decorated, 2021

resemble much like the one of my memories, filled with ornaments. However, since it was so close to Christmas, I could not find ornaments anywhere. I was so determined to have the tree up and eventually managed to find plenty of ornaments for my tree after travelling far and wide. The journey of planning for Christmas to decorating the tree was an absolute joy as it took me back to childhood. My tree also stood on the same spot all



Figure 13. Ashlyn Koh, Idea sketch for Merry, 2023, scanned image

year round. Throughout the year, I was gifted ornaments from friends who were aware of my ornament search. What started off as a personal chase for childhood memory grew into a collection of new memories.

This experience inspired the creation of *MERRY*, a collectible figurine. Looking back at the search and the memory each new ornament brought over the year, I wanted to create an interactive piece that evokes such feelings. The design of Merry merges the memories of my two Christmas trees – a squished giant and an almost ornament-less, sad-looking tree. Hence Merry has a clean surface, with minimal expression conveying disappointment due to the lack of ornaments. By triggering empathy, I wanted collectors to be able to personalize Merry through their own ornaments, which is explored in my initial sketches (Figure 12.). Ideas included hollowing the insides of the figurine to allow collectors to store their personal items, or even exploring the potential of customisation through wearables.

The simple design of Merry also took mass production into account. Merry was initially considered to be mass produced. However, in that I am working on my own, I figured it would be difficult to have multiple figures produced in short time frame if I were to work with a complicated model.

Once the CGI model of Merry got printed with a 3D printer, I went through the process of hand sculpting to improve the base followed with sand



Figure 14. Ashlyn Koh, 3D models of Merry created in Nomad Sculpt, 2023, rendered image

blasting, sanding, priming and repeating the process until I got a smooth surface. This process was crucial to determining the quality of the artefact as imperfections on the surface impacts the quality of the mould.

Once the 3D printed model was perfected, I created a mould with Pinkysil, a fast-setting silicone. Once the mould sets, the mould is scored and the base model is removed. The mould is then ready for pouring. I chose resin, which is a common pouring medium and material for collectibles (Figures 14 and 15.).



Figure 15. Ashlyn Koh, Merry on my writing desk with my collection, 2023

As it was my first-time attempting toy making, there were definite trial and errors to be reflected. My resin sculpture came out with air bubbles on the surface which had to be further modified. This could be prevented with the creation of supports prior to the 3D printing process, which will leave pour holes in the mould for the excess resin to escape, ensuring no cavity is created during casting. I have also underestimated the time it takes for resin pours to cure, which is around a week. Commercial mass production

is costly for a small project like this so I have settled with individual pours for the time being.

While the artefact represents subjective memory of home and encourages audiences to do the same utilising collective identity, the practice seemed to lack the question of why I collect and the personal meaning of collection. Hence, I tried answering this question with another practice: through storytelling.

## Exploring Collecting and Making-Home through Drawing and Storytelling: I was born a fish with legs

This short picture storybook was created from personal journal records as a vision loss patient, to process my emotional attachment towards collecting and making-home.

The protagonist, a fish with two legs, is a visual imagery of myself. In Korea, there is a concept of birth dreams, 태몽 (taemong), where parents or relatives dream of the child before birth. There is no limit to how the child can be shown, and could be represented through various acts of the dreamer. For example, one could dream about eating a fruit or encountering an animal. My birth dream was a goldfish – a special one, according to my parents. Hence, I have designed a character to resemble the external characteristics of a goldfish but with legs (Figures 16 and 17.). The legs represent conflict of settlement, as described in the story. The fish feels like it does not belong in the water nor land despite the ability to travel both. Such imagery reflects my emotional journey and confusion, as I search for home.

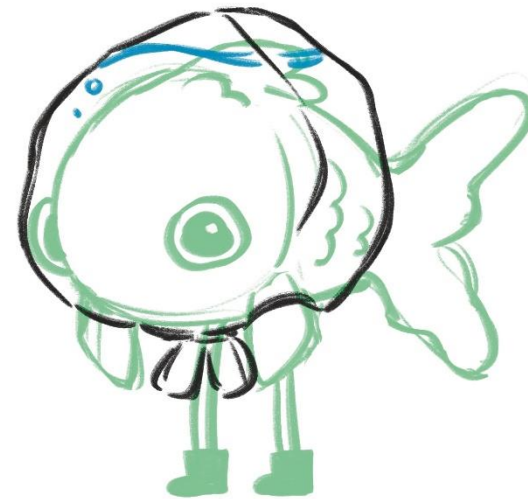


Figure 16. Ashlyn Koh, Character Sketch - *I was born a fish with legs*, 2024, digital illustration

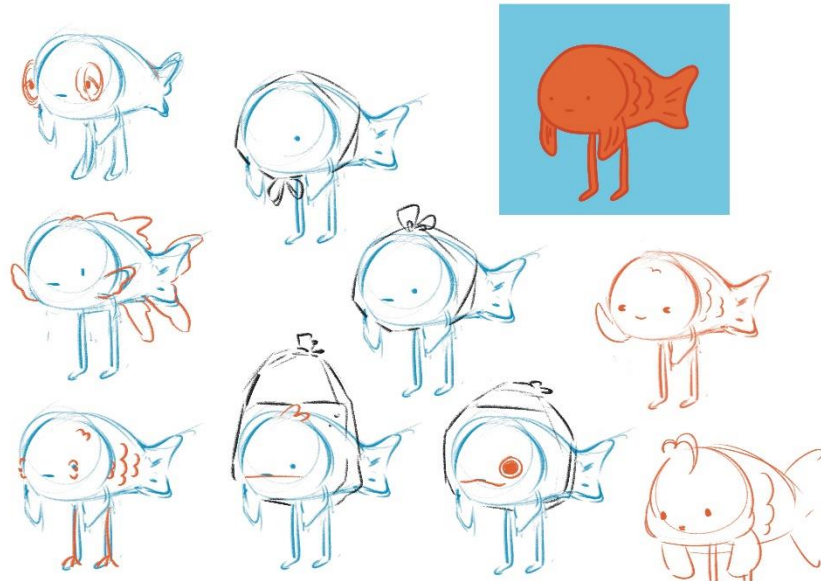


Figure 18. Ashlyn Koh, Character design - *I was born a fish with legs*, 2024, digital illustration

The original script was written in Korean in that I tend to write personal journal entries in Korean. The text was then translated to English to aid the understanding of the non-Korean speaking reader. Prior to illustrating the entire book, I did a few render tests to decide on what style I wanted to maintain throughout (Figure 18.). Although I was satisfied with some of the tests, I wanted consistency and was not sure whether I would be able to replicate the same style with those test renders. Thus, I proceeded with a rather simplistic style of line art with solid colours.

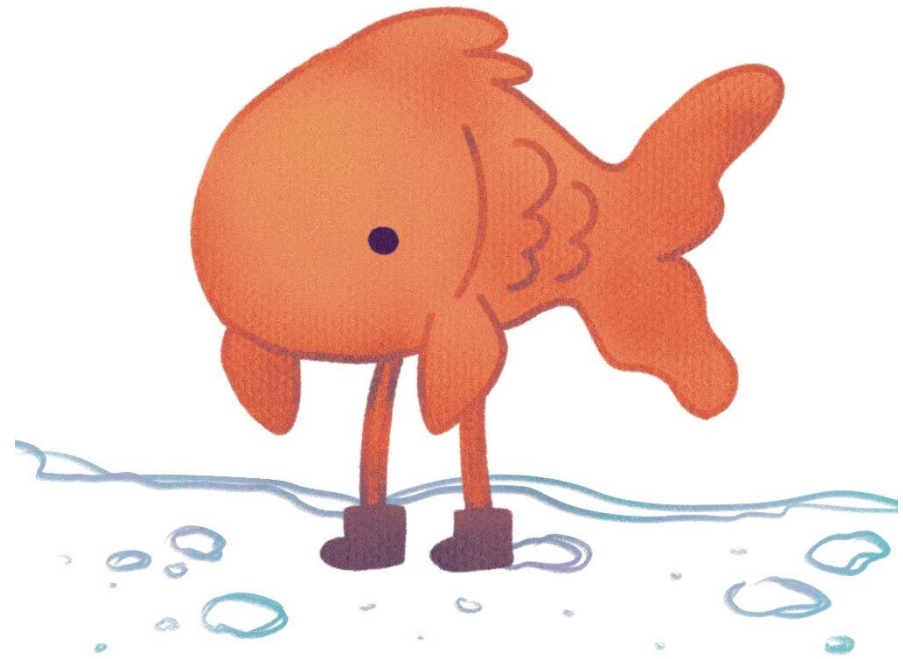


Figure 17. Ashlyn Koh, Test Render 1 - *I was born a fish with legs*, 2024, digital illustration

In that I am using solid colours, I minimized my colour palette and tried to avoid using too many colours to prevent the illustrations from feeling distracting. I further utilised colour to convey difference in emotion and the process of healing. While the fish is consumed by “the dot”, representing vision loss, the overall colour of the drawing is monotonous. The gradual re-introduction of colour symbolises the process of healing through collecting and identifying home. While the fish is entirely red to begin with, part of its body remains black at the end of the story (Figure 19.). Through its altered appearance, I aimed to convey the message that even the struggle is part of oneself and we only learn to live with it with the help of others.

*I was born a fish with legs* explores my autobiographical story. In that my goal with this practice was to create a short picture storybook, I have omitted certain aspects of the story. Although the visual imageries speak to me, the book illustrates more about my personal experience; thus, a very subjective reason behind collecting. While I have answered the question behind why I collect, I wanted another attempt to incorporate my learning to creating a story that a wider audience can relate to.



Figure 19. Ashlyn Koh, Consolidation -  
*I was born a fish with legs*, 2024,  
digital illustration

## Consolidating the practices through Autoethnographic Storytelling: Museum of Memories

*Museum of Memories* is a fragmented picture book of multiple episodes that communicates the potential of collecting and objects through the communal feeling of nostalgia. The stories are based on a fictional world where people have limited capacity to remember. Thus, selective long-term memory is stored in the form of objects in households (Figures 20 and 21.). Often in times of challenges, we find it difficult to recollect positive occurrences of the past in that we are too fixated in the problems of the present. By placing such fictional limitation, I aimed to imitate such an experience through the imagery of a film roll as visual representation of memory.

Based on the feedback received from my work on *I was born a fish with legs*, I have decided to implement a different style of drawing for this practice.



Figure 21. Ashlyn Koh, Rough visual ideas - *Museum of Memories*, 2024, digital illustration

Rather than using line drawing with simple lines and solid colours, the charm of the illustrations of *Museum of Memories* lies in the detail of the illustrations (Figure 22.). Through the detailed render, I hope for the readers to immerse themselves in the fictional world presented before them.

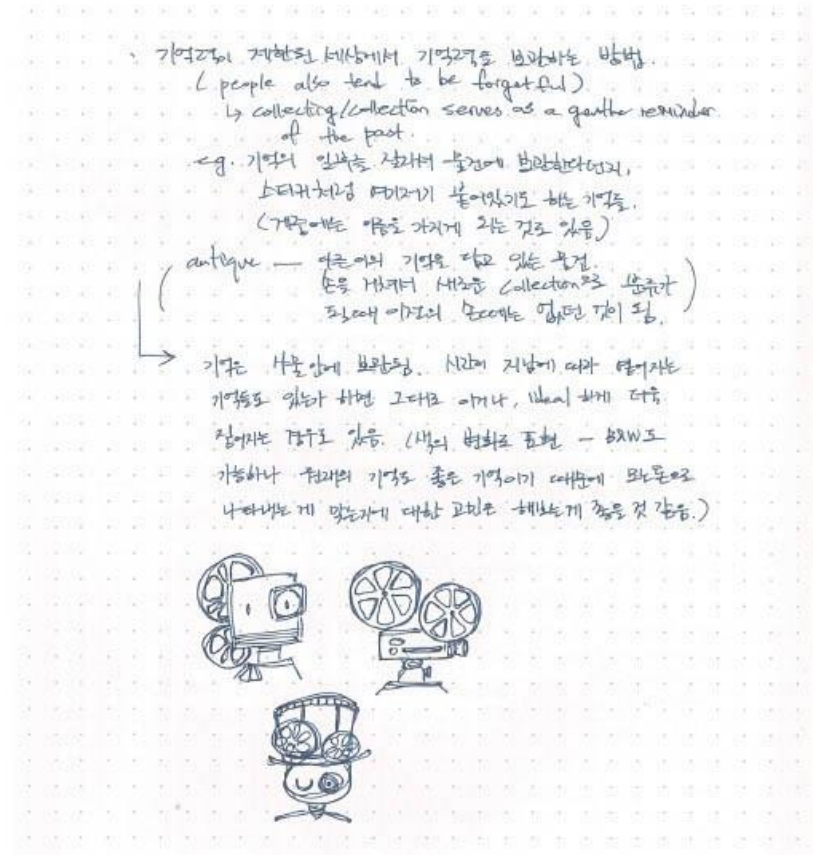


Figure 20. Ashlyn Koh, Treatment brainstorm - *Museum of Memories*, 2024, scanned image

Episodes of the book were inspired by the writing of Susan Stewart and her book *ON LONGING: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, which was also discussed in the Contextual Review. The ability of an object as a collection seemed to be contradicting itself when it comes to capturing memory. On a wider scale, souvenir, also considered part of a collection, has the capacity to “serve as traces of authentic experience” (Stewart, 1993, p. 135). However, unless directly lived or experienced, it is meaningless, as “it represents not the lived experience of its maker but the “second-hand” experience of its possessor/owner” (Stewart, 1993, p.135). As exemplified, collecting or collection is a unique experience that is only valid to the collector. Once a collection leaves the hand of its possessor, it becomes void of meaning – merely a simple object. Such a concept is explored through the use of AR. When certain illustrations are viewed through the screen, a strip of film appears to play the memory that is associated with the collection. However, once the object is passed down, the viewers can observe the disappearance of memory that was recorded in the object as the memory is no longer valid to the new owner.



Figure 22. Ashlyn Koh, *The Curator - Museum of Memories*, 2024, digital illustration

My last practice challenged me as a researcher, as it further poses questions on the implications of collecting that I have overlooked in this research. My view and experience on collecting are biased, as I have, to an extent, benefitted from the act of collecting. However, collecting is also considered a form of escapism and could potentially lead to addiction or hoarding behaviours. While the fictional world I have created limits the individual's ability to remember, it also gifts them with the choice of selective memory. Such behaviour and its implication on making-home could potentially be reviewed in future research.

## Conclusion

I was in constant transition throughout this research. Over the past few years, I have been trying to answer my attachment towards collecting as the potential duality of the subject has been a lasting internal conflict. While this complex phenomenon has not been answered to its full extent, this research has led me to question the essence of collecting and why it is such a meaningful conversation to me as a practitioner.

This practice-based research identifies ways in which collecting serves as a method for immigrants and individuals with fragmented identities to anchor themselves within a new environment. By engaging with autobiography and autoethnography as methodologies, this research not only highlighted personal narratives but also extended the research insight to broader cultural and social phenomena.

My three practical projects embarked on an exploration of the relationship between home and self through the lens of collecting, aiming to unpack the multifaceted process of making-home:

- *MERRY*, the Christmas tree-shaped figurine, demonstrated the power of physical objects through the nostalgic evocation of childhood memory of Christmas. This project explores the dual role of collecting as both a personal and collective act, highlighting the potential of individual memory as part of broader cultural practices.

- *I was born a fish with legs*, an autobiographical picture storybook, delved deeper into the subjective experience of collecting as a coping mechanism during times of personal crisis. This work highlighted the therapeutic potential of collecting, illustrating how the act of gathering and preserving objects can facilitate emotional healing and self-discovery.
- The final project, *Museum of Memories*, synthesized the insights gained from the previous works into a comprehensive exploration of collecting as a universal experience. By incorporating augmented reality (AR), this project extended the narrative possibilities of traditional picture books, allowing viewers to engage interactively with the depicted memories.

Throughout this research, the concept of home was continually redefined and expanded. Traditional notions of home as a static, physical space were challenged, giving way to a more fluid understanding that encompasses emotional ties, cultural practices, and personal memories. The research revealed that home is not merely a place of residence but a complex construct shaped by ongoing processes of remembering, collecting, and narrating experiences.

The findings from this research also pose important questions for future exploration. The duality of collecting, as both a beneficial and potentially

problematic practice, warrants further investigation. While collecting can serve as a means of escapism and emotional support, it can also lead to addictive behaviours and hoarding. Understanding this balance is crucial for comprehensively addressing the implications of collecting on personal well-being and social practices.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the interplay between material culture, memory, and identity. By foregrounding the role of collecting in making-home, it offers valuable insights into how individuals navigate and negotiate their sense of belonging in a constantly changing world. Collecting, in a way, is a yearning for the past, a nostalgic calling. Through tokens of the past, I feel at home.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Journaling as part of Documentation of Practice

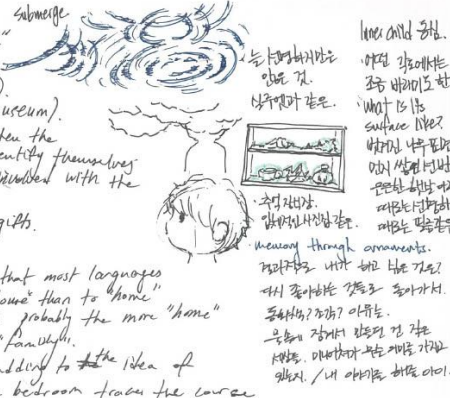
(definition of a that  
"collection is simply a collection  
exists if the owner thinks it does."  
submerge

historically, collection works like  
a gendered ally (threat of capitalism).  
→ evidence of the past. (e.g. Museum).  
although many (back in the past when the  
survey was conducted) do not identify themselves  
as collectors, they must have been involved with the  
act of collecting.  
e.g. shopping, mail ordering, gifts.

'making home' function.  
= "idea of home is unique in that most languages  
have meanings closer to "house" than to "home"  
in Kor. this is the same and probably the more "home"  
sounding word would be "family".  
is way of embracing space, adding to the idea of  
homeliness. e.g. Vroba of the bedroom from the course  
of the self over the life cycle (p.102) such as  
children having their most important objects in their own bedrooms.

although, another interesting point is that a collection does not always have to  
belong inside. e.g. cars, clothes, tattoos.

"importance of tension & release of tension in human psychological well-being" (p.11)  
through collection. / there is no completion — once one goal is reached,  
another is formed."



"How can collectible (art toys) contribute to (archiving memory) through the practice of 'making home'?"

"How can (memories) be archived through collecting (or collectibles) and making home practice?"

role of (art toys) collectibles.  
- preserving inner child.  
- creating comfort space.  
→ mood lifting. (psychological benefit)  
- expressing self → my collection collecting then & now.



→ definition of home will have to be explored.

→ for this question, collecting should be the main part of the question. e.g. how can collecting...

→ then: mostly something that was given to me. (environment made → "collection" based on what is given.  
now: active collecting but there are still items that are gifted that are part of my collection.  
∴ talking about season of getting, there will definitely be an external factor taking part in the act of collecting.

### Analogous record

p.14. Because writing by hand assumes the speed of the body, it is linked to the personal.  
... To sign your name ... track of the body.

### Object

p.14. 1. quantitatively provide for history.  
2. "authenticity."

"temporality of everyday life", "temporality is held to be ongoing and nonreversible"

p.22. exemplified as printed books "object it has a life of its own, a life outside human time, the time of the body and its value"

p.23. "Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, ..."  
↳ "the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent..."  
→ the presence of an object anchors the past & the present together  
↳ ability to "capture"

### The miniature. (tabeau)

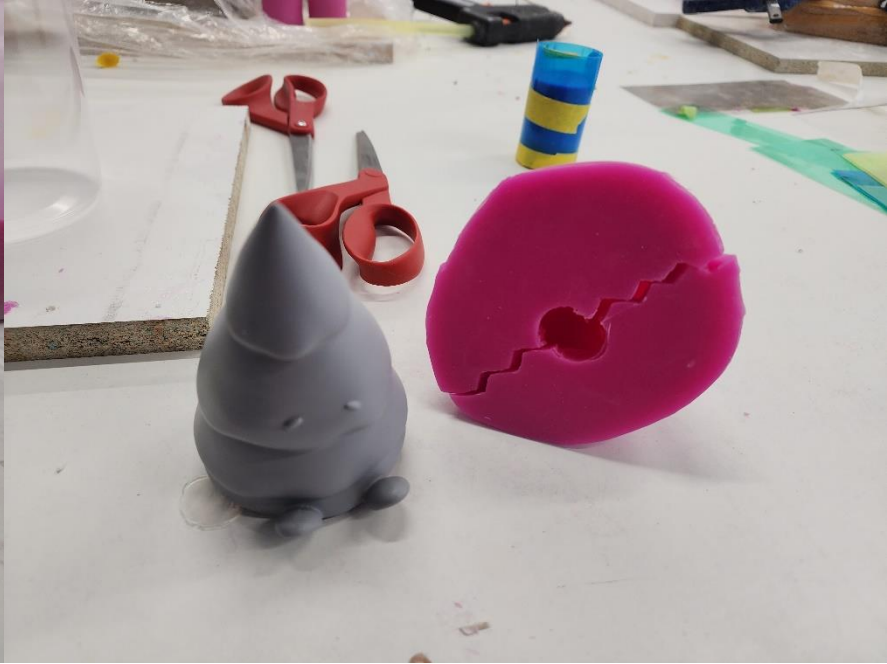
p.49. Such "still shots", say, before the family car or the Christmas tree, are always profoundly ideological, for they eternalize a moment

↳ while such record may not provide the entire context, it provides a "point of view" — much like what is seen on the lens.

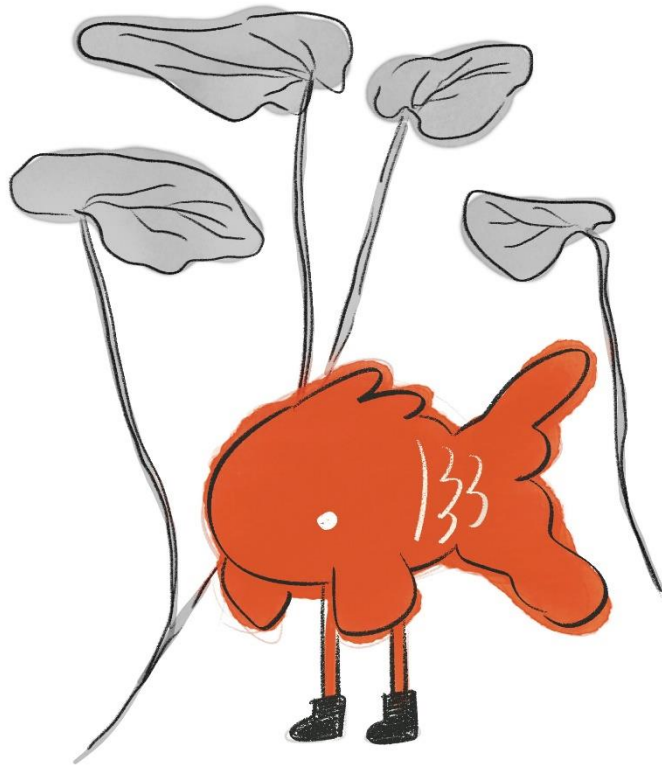


Appendix 2: Additional Documentation of Practice on Merry

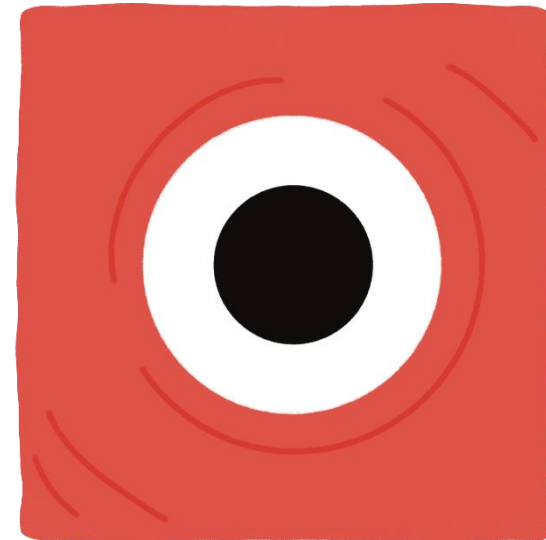
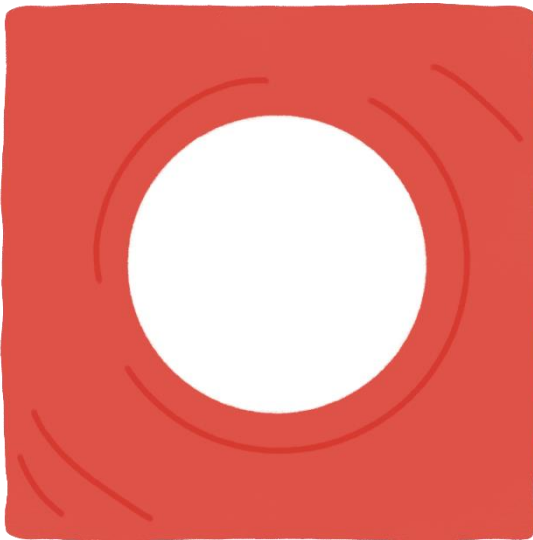
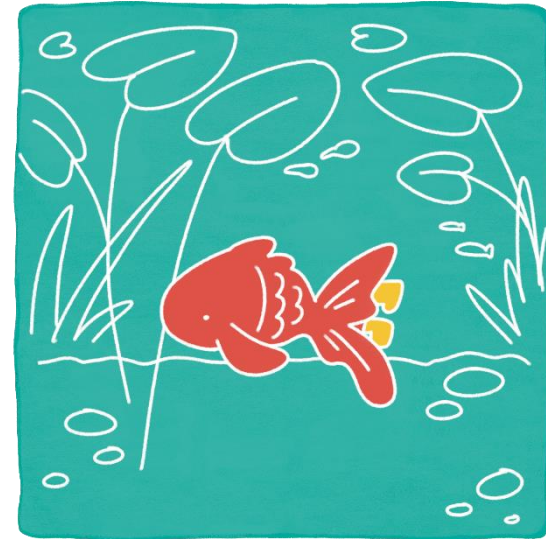


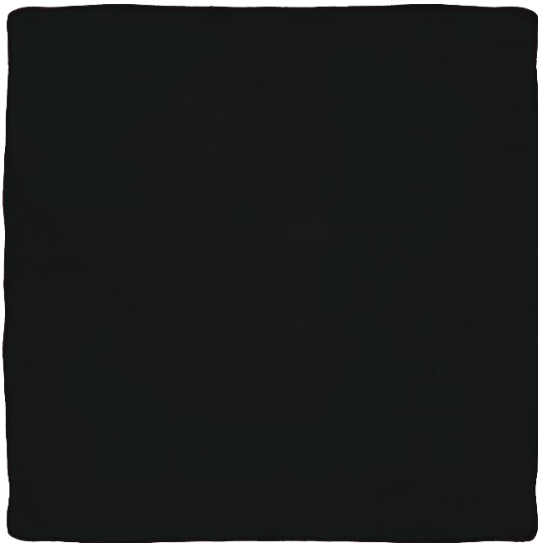


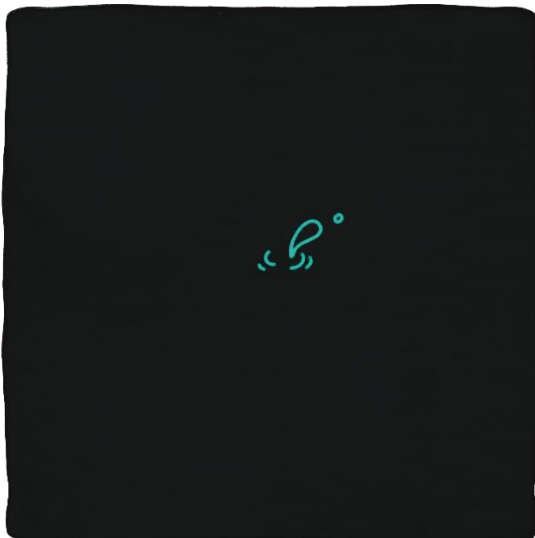
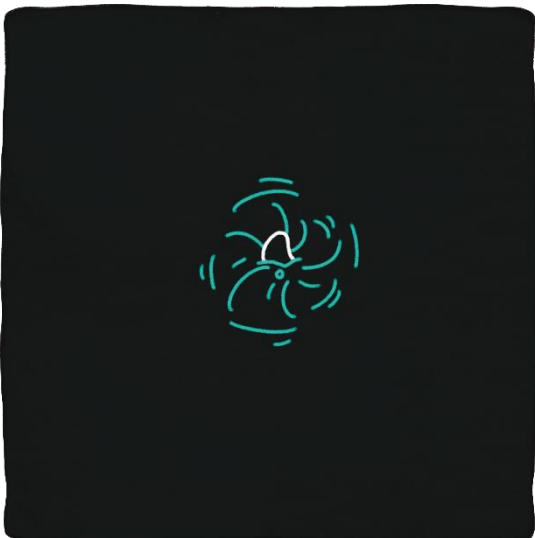
Appendix 3: Render Tests for *I was born a fish with legs*

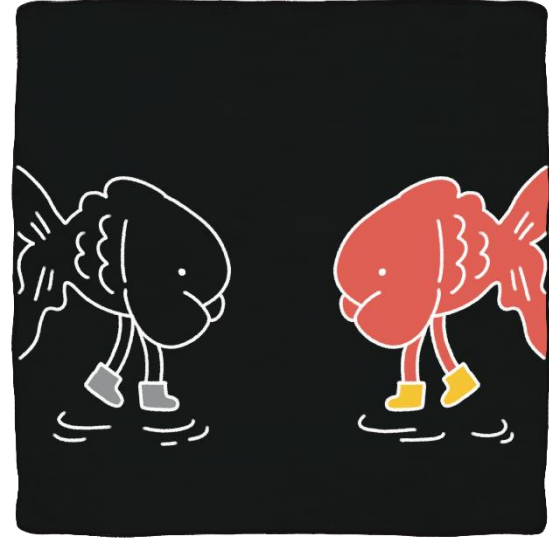


Appendix 4: Illustrations for *I was born a fish with legs*



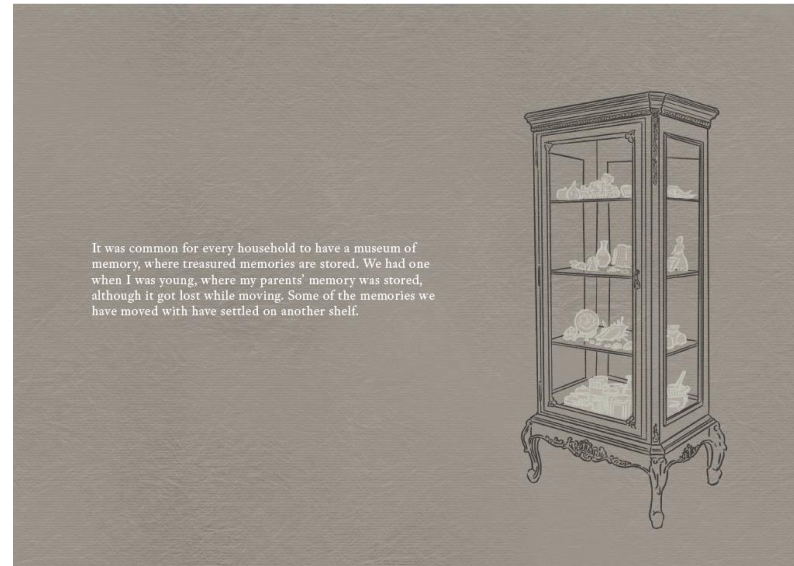
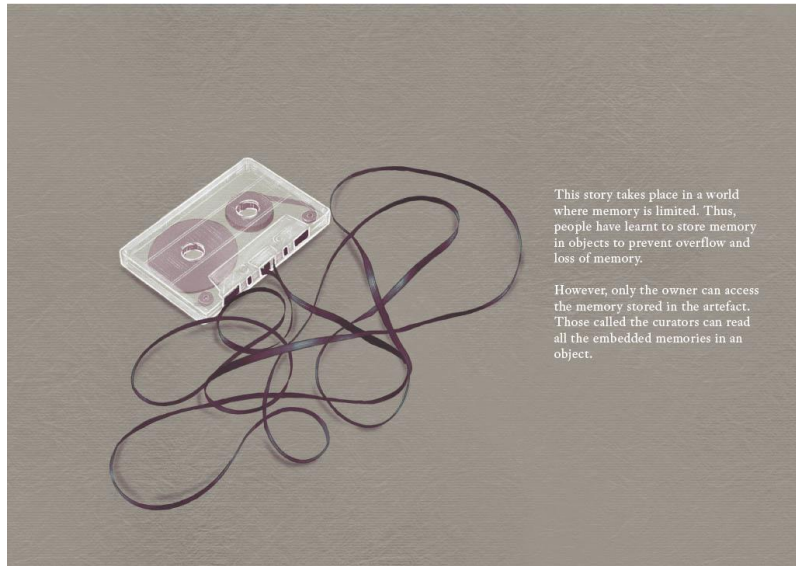


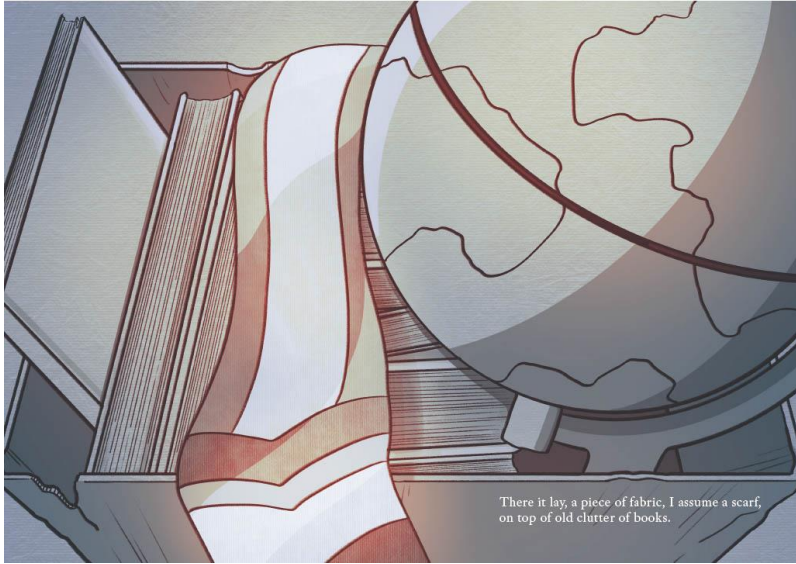




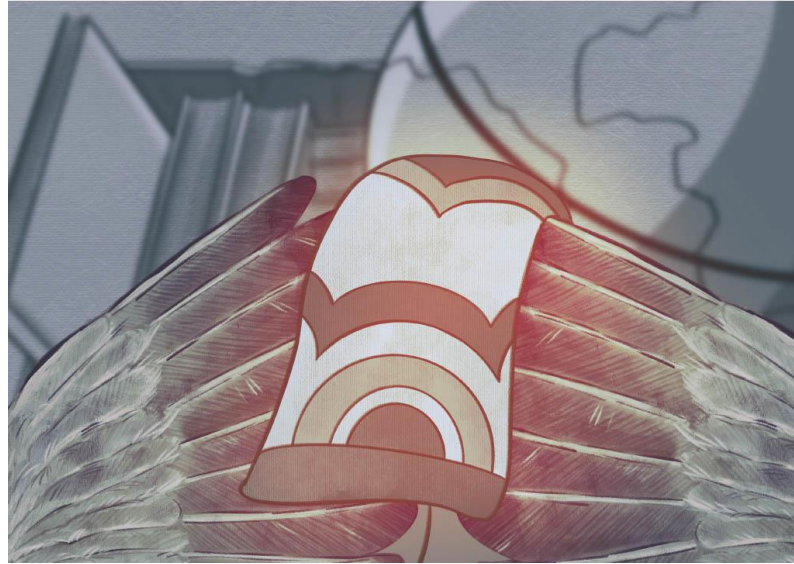


Appendix 5: Illustrations for *Museum of Memories*





There it lay, a piece of fabric, I assume a scarf,  
on top of old clutter of books.



"This isn't from around here, you know that child? It is from the land of afar, where the goose travels."

The storekeeper, who used to be a curator, told me to take the scarf with me.

"Can't you read anything from it?"

"Of course not, child. You see, it just changed its owner."



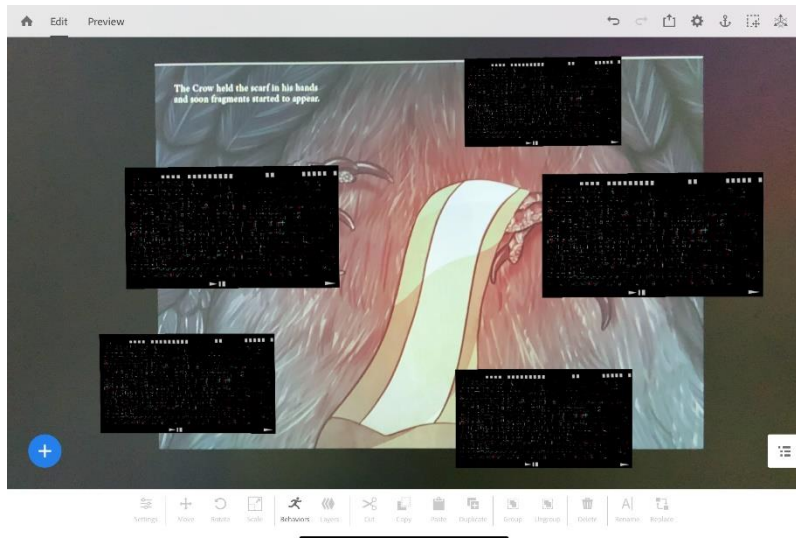
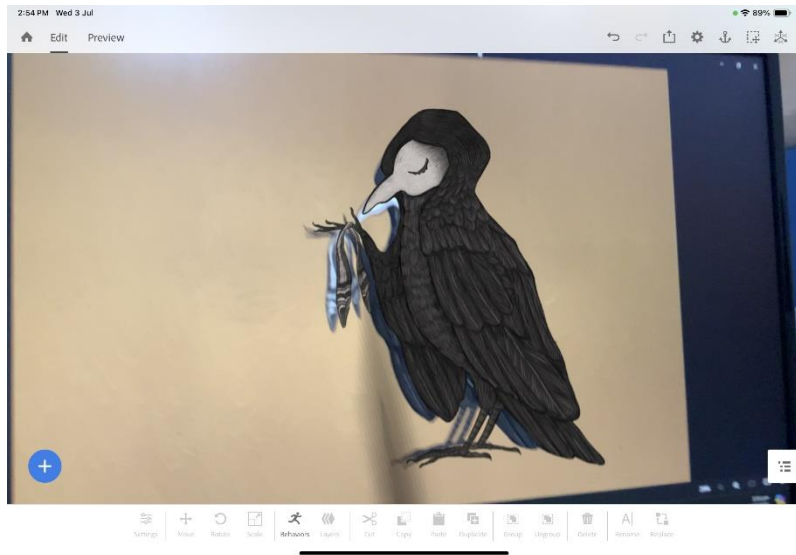
So I took it to the Crow, the current curator of the town.

"Can you help me find the owner of this scarf?"

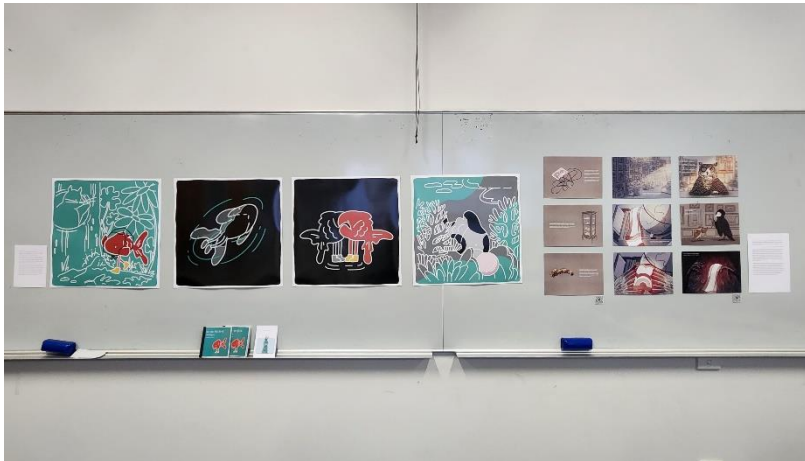
The Crow held the scarf in his hands  
and soon fragments started to appear.



## Appendix 6: AR tests and set up for *Museum of Memories*



## Appendix 7: Exhibition



The exhibition included:

- *MERRY* (omitted in the photos) – initial 3D print, polished model and resin casted model
- *I was born a fish with legs* – posters, two booklets and a postcard
- *Museum of Memories* – posters and two QR codes attached under respective pages including AR components